

Abstract 248

TITLE: Beliefs and Science in the Perception of Risks of the Transmission of HIV Infection
Among Asian-Indian Youths

AUTHORS: Bhattachary, Gauri (University of Illinois at Urbana, IL)

OBJECTIVES: The processes of distilling messages and translating knowledge for behavioral change vary among individuals. People's perceptions and beliefs, based on sociocultural, familial, and environmental factors, determine those variations, which can influence the perception of the risks of HIV infection. This study (1) compared and contrasted the knowledge, beliefs, and "myths" about the perceived risks of HIV infection, (2) distinguished between general and specific knowledge relevant to educating youths on how HIV is or is not transmitted, and (3) explored the influence of cultural beliefs on developing HIV educational programs among Asian-Indian (Asians who emigrated from India) youths born in the United States.

METHODS: This study was grounded in a socioecological framework and integrated scientific knowledge on mechanisms for transmission of HIV/AIDS. Subjects included 167 Asian-Indian youths, aged 13 to 18, who resided in the New York metropolitan area. The youths were interviewed using a semistructured instrument that was field-tested for cultural relevance to this group. Youth-reported data were analyzed using multivariate statistical techniques.

RESULTS: Although 86% correctly answered that "sharing drug needles" is a true transmission mode, 47% did not know that "sharing a razor with a HIV positive person" can transmit HIV, and 17% falsely believed that this action could not transmit HIV. More than 25% of the youths incorrectly answered that only gay men can have HIV—a misconception that may inhibit adolescents from socializing with gay people. In addition, 27% believed that donating blood, 14% believed that taking blood tests, and 17% believed that being bitten by mosquitoes could transmit HIV. The preference for speaking English predicted more knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

CONCLUSIONS: The results indicated (1) a gap between scientific knowledge and beliefs and (2) the prevalence of misconceptions and myths about HIV infection that can perpetuate fear and anxiety. Although the lack of scientific information about the transmission of HIV/AIDS has critical consequences for spreading the disease, misconceptions about false modes of transmission may lead to feelings of paranoia or a fatalistic attitude. Content-specific messages communicated via culturally relevant pathways must clarify scientific knowledge about how HIV is and is not transmitted.

PRESENTER CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Gauri Bhattacharya

Address: 1207 W. Oregon St.
Urbana, IL 61801

Telephone: (217) 328-3067

Fax: (217) 328-3067

E-mail: gbhattac@uiuc.edu